

**Remarks on Presenting the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights and the Presidential Medal of Freedom**

*December 6, 2000*

**The President.** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, and good morning. Let me begin by thanking Secretary Albright for her remarks and her 8 years of leadership, first at the United Nations and then at the State Department, always standing up and speaking out for human rights.

And my friend of so many years John Lewis, whom I knew before I ever decided to run for President, who started with me, and as you can hear, is going out with me, finishing. *[Laughter]* In my private office on the second floor of the White House Residence, I have a picture of a very young John Lewis being beaten at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, that I was given when we went back there on the 35th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. And he has worked now for more than 35 years. I can't help noting that he's still at it. He had a piece in the New York Times the other day making the simple but apparently controversial point that the right to vote includes not only the right to cast the vote but the right to have it counted. Thank you, John.

I also want to welcome James Roosevelt and his wife, Ann, here, and Members of the Congress, Congressman Ben Gilman, Donald Payne, and Ed Pastor. I want to thank Sandy Berger and Eric Schwartz, who have worked at the White House on human rights since the day we got here in 1993. I want to thank, in his absence, Assistant Secretary of State Harold Koh, who tried to come back from Africa today to be here but couldn't make it, and our Ambassador to the U.N. Human Rights Commission, Nancy Rubin.

We're here today to honor six extraordinary people. Like Madeleine, I also want to say that I wish Hillary could be here, but she's at Senator school today. *[Laughter]* It's been a great 2 days at our house, going to Senator school. I had to make sure that—I said yesterday, I said, "This is your first day of school, and so you have to go to bed early. Get a good night's sleep"—*[laugh-*

*ter]*—"Wear a nice dress. It's the first day of school." So today is the second day of school, and I'm sorry she couldn't be here.

But I will always be grateful that part of our service involved the opportunity she had to go to Beijing 5 years ago, to say that women's rights are human rights. And I'm grateful that she'll have a chance to continue that fight in the United States Senate.

I'd also like to thank Melanne Verveer, who worked with us every day for 8 years, and for Bonnie Campbell at the Department of Justice and Theresa Loar at the Department of State.

Thanks to so many of you in this room, for 8 years I've had the privilege of trying to bring Americans' actions more in line with America's beliefs. Secretary Albright and John Lewis both said we have made support for democracy and freedom of religion an important part of our foreign policy. We stood up for civil rights and against discrimination at home and abroad and made it clear that America cannot simply stand by when human rights are trampled.

Dr. King once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." This is a lesson we can never afford to forget, especially in this fast-forward century, when satellites, E-mail, and jet planes expand the frontiers of human contact and human awareness and bring pain and suffering instantly home to us. Globalization is bringing us closer together, with many benefits, but as with all new benefits, new responsibilities accompany them. And we have both the moral imperative and a practical incentive to do even more to recognize the rights and dignity of every person, everywhere.

In spite of what we have accomplished, which the Secretary of State articulated so clearly, major challenges lie ahead. We can never stop striving at home to become the more perfect Union of our Founders' dreams. That means we cannot abandon the struggle against discrimination and injustice here.

Specifically, let me say, I hope that in this abbreviated session of the Congress, that Congress will send me the hate crimes legislation that we worked so hard for, and which both Houses have voted for, but which a minority may yet be able to prevent. If we don't

get it, I certainly hope it's one of the first pieces of legislation the next administration will ask for and sign into law.

We also must continue to support emerging democracies abroad. That means, of course, support for free and fair elections but also support for strong democratic institutions, good governance in the fight against corruption, speaking out when the progress of democracy or the most basic human rights are under threat, whether it's the scourge of slavery in Sudan, the denial of rights to women and girls in Afghanistan, curtailing religious freedom in China.

And let me say especially to the students, religious communities, and human rights activists who have done so much to publicize the atrocities of Sudan, America must continue to press for an end to these egregious practices and make clear that the Sudanese Government cannot join the community of nations until fundamental changes are made on these fronts.

Ultimately, support for human rights means preparing to act to stop suffering and violence when our values and our interests demand it. We cannot right every wrong, of course, but we cannot choose inaction, either. I have been reminded again and again that much of the best work in promoting human rights and defending freedom is done by people outside Government, students, activists, religious leaders from all walks of life, sharing an unshakable belief in the simple message of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that all humans are free and equal in dignity and rights.

Ten years after the signing of the Universal Declaration, Eleanor Roosevelt reminded us that the destiny of human rights is in the hands of all our citizens and all our communities. I established the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Awards to honor men and women who have taken the future of human rights into their committed hands. I have had the honor of working closely with several of this year's honorees and the equal honor of receiving advice and, on occasion, criticism from them, as well. So I would like to say a few words about each.

To the Lakota Sioux, the birth of a white buffalo calf is a sign of peace and harmony to come, a prophecy of the end of war and,

especially, of the suffering of children. When Tillie Black Bear founded the White Buffalo Calf Women's Society more than 20 years ago, she sought to end the suffering of women and children who were victims of domestic violence. She founded the first women's shelter on an Indian reservation and then went on to help found two more.

A survivor of domestic violence herself, she has taught and counseled victims, batterers, and law enforcement officials alike. She is a founder and former president of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and known around the Nation as a leading advocate for battered women.

I want to add that, fittingly, Tillie was born on Human Rights Day, December the 10th. We thank her for her courage and a lifetime of commitment.

From the tall tales he loved to tell, to the size of his ambitions, Fred Cuny was larger than life in every sense. But the biggest thing about him was his heart and his devotion to saving lives anywhere he could. He participated in more than 70 relief missions to some of the world's most desolate places. And wherever he went, he made a lasting difference.

In Bosnia, he smuggled in enough equipment to build two water purification plants under snipers' noses, providing clean drinking water for 60 percent of the city during the worst days of the siege. General Shalikashvili called him "the hero" of our operations to help starving Kurds in Northern Iraq.

His last mission, like so many others, was to a remote and dangerous place where outsiders rarely go but where help was desperately needed. That place was Chechnya, and Fred Cuny was killed there 5 years ago. His son, Craig, is here today to accept his father's award. And we thank him and all the Cuny family—and there are lots of them here, thank goodness—for the life of one of America's and the world's great humanitarians. Thank you.

The story I am about to tell will not surprise anyone who has ever had any contact with Elaine Jones. She argued her first court case at the tender age of 11. She visited a

dentist without getting her parents' permission, and when she couldn't pay the bill, the dentist decided to sue. Her parents had to work, so Elaine went to court alone and convinced the judge to dismiss the case. I wonder what the argument was? *[Laughter]*

That's when she decided she wanted to be a lawyer, and she's been speaking truth to power ever since. She was the first African-American woman to graduate from the University of Virginia Law School; later, the first African-American to sit on the American Bar Association board of governors. With a brief interruption for Government service, she's been a leader in the NAACP's fight for equal justice for almost 25 years now. She is an ardent advocate before Congress, a skillful litigator before the Supreme Court, a constant voice for people in need.

Thank you, Elaine, for being a champion of human rights for all Americans.

In the spring of 1954, a young Army Lieutenant named Norman Dorsen found himself on the front lines of justice in his very first job out of law school, defending civil liberties from the attacks of Senator Joe McCarthy. Now, Norman has had other jobs and responsibilities, but he never abandoned his post in the struggle to preserve the rights and liberties of every American.

He argued and prepared briefs for landmark Supreme Court cases, such as *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which established an accused person's right to legal counsel. He was, for 15 years, the President of the American Civil Liberties Union. He is now chairman of the board of the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights. For almost 40 years, he's inspired law students as a professor at New York University Law School and director of its programs in civil liberties.

I've gotten to know him through our discussions of a political Third Way, but today we thank him for reminding us that in every age, respect for civil liberties is the American way. Thank you, Norman.

In tough places, where civilians are struggling to get out, chances are you will find Archbishop Theodore McCarrick working hard to get in and to help them. The litany of countries he has visited sounds more suited to a diplomat than an archbishop: the former Soviet Union, the Balkans, the coun-

tries devastated by Hurricane Mitch, East Timor, Ethiopia, Burundi, Cuba, Haiti, Colombia.

Two years ago I was honored to send him as one of my representatives on a groundbreaking trip to discuss religious freedom with China's leaders. This year, he has been a tireless and effective leader in promoting debt relief for poor countries—I might say, one of the truly outstanding accomplishments that we have achieved in a bipartisan fashion in this town in the last 5 years. It's an amazing thing.

At the same time, the Archbishop is much beloved for practicing at home what he preaches around the world. This year, as he pressed the United States to fund debt relief, he forgave the \$10 million in debts of poor parishes in his Newark diocese.

Archbishop, we thank you for your devotion to all God's children, and we welcome you to your new home in the diocese of Washington, DC.

These five Americans have made our Nation and the world a better place. May they continue to inspire and guide us all for years to come.

Major, read the citations.

*[At this point, Maj. William F. Mullen III, USMC, Marine Corps Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the Eleanor Roosevelt Awards for Human Rights.]*

**The President.** Do you want to know what Elaine said to me? *[Laughter]* So I said, "Well, what argument did you make when you were 11 years old?" She said, "I said he didn't have permission to take all those X rays. I mean, I was just 11 years old." *[Laughter]* So this guy was supposed to be the only person on Earth who could have said no to her. *[Laughter]* We need you now, girl. That's good. That's good. *[Laughter]*

The Presidential Medal of Freedom was created by President Truman to honor noble service in times of war. It was expanded by President Kennedy to honor service in times of peace. I have been privileged to award the medal to many champions of liberty.

Today we continue that tradition with a difference. The person we honor, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, cannot be with us. In fact,

she doesn't even know we're here today, thinking of her and her struggle in her country. She sits confined, as we speak here, in her home in Rangoon, unable to speak to her people or the world. But her struggle continues, and her spirit still inspires us.

Twelve years ago she went home to Burma to visit her ailing mother and found herself at the helm of a popular movement for democracy and human rights. A decade ago, she led her persecuted party in parliamentary elections that were neither free nor fair; yet they still won 80 percent of the seats. Her victory has never been recognized by the Government of Burma, but her hold on the hearts of the people in Burma has never been broken.

In the years since, she had seen her supporters beaten, tortured, and killed, yet she has never responded to hatred and violence in kind. All she has ever asked for is peaceful dialog. She has been treated without mercy, yet she has preached forgiveness, promising that in a democratic Burma there will be no retribution and nothing but honor and respect for the military.

No one has done more than she to teach us that the desire for liberty is universal, that it is a matter of conscience, not culture. When her son, Alexander, accepted her Nobel Peace Prize, he said she would never accept such an honor in her name, but only in the name of all the people of Burma. I imagine she would say the same thing today—that she would tell us that for all she has suffered, the separation from her family, the loss of her beloved husband, nothing compares to what the Burmese people, themselves, have endured, years of tyranny and poverty in a land of such inherent promise.

Our thoughts are with them. This medal stands for our determination to help them see a better day. The only weapons the Burmese people have are words, reason, and the example of this astonishing, brave woman. Let us add our voices to their peaceful arsenal. Keep using every instrument of influence to support Aung San Suu Kyi's quest for democracy through dialog.

Those who rule Burma should know that they can regain their place in the world only when they regain the trust of their own peo-

ple and respect their chosen leaders. And the woman we honor today should know, America will always be a friend to freedom in Burma—a friend for as long as it takes to reach the goal for which she has sacrificed so very much.

I would like to ask Alexander to come up here, and I'd like to ask the major to read the citation.

[ *At this point, Major Mullen read the citation, and the President presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom.* ]

**The President.** Thank you all for coming today. We are adjourned.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The President presented the awards and medal a part of the observance of Human Rights Day. In his remarks, he referred to James Roosevelt, grandson of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and his wife, Ann; Eric P. Schwartz, Senior Director, Multilateral and Humanitarian Affairs, National Security Council; Melanne Vermeer, Chief of Staff to the First Lady; Bonnie J. Campbell, Director, Violence Against Women Office, Office of Justice Programs, Department of Justice; Theresa Loar, Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, Department of State; and Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, USA, (Ret.), former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

## Statement on the Pathways to College Network

December 6, 2000

I applaud today's announcement of the Pathways to College Network, an important partnership that will complement our GEAR UP and TRIO initiatives by helping to put disadvantaged students on track to a college education. While more and more Americans are enrolling in college, too many disadvantaged students in America still lack the support, resources, motivation, and high expectations that they need to succeed.

In today's information economy, education may be the best investment of a lifetime. Over the past 8 years, we have made the largest investment in higher education since the GI bill by increasing Pell grants and creating the HOPE scholarship, the lifetime learning